

Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary elections efficiently run but a restrictive campaign environment stifled public engagement, international observers say

BISHKEK, 1 December 2025 – Kyrgyzstan's early parliamentary elections were efficiently run but the restrictive campaign environment stifled candidate and voter engagement, and while the fundamental freedoms are protected by the constitution, they are increasingly limited in practice and recent changes to the legal framework weakened the involvement of political parties in the elections. Although the election administration enjoyed public trust in its technical ability to prepare the elections and made efforts to increase transparency, these were insufficient in some key aspects, international observers said in a [statement](#) today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), found that the legal framework provided a technical basis for holding elections, but fell short on a number of international standards for democratic elections. In addition, the limited opportunities for public consultation on the fundamental changes to the legal framework ahead of the elections raised concerns.

"These elections were conducted under a fundamentally reformed framework that was amended repeatedly throughout 2025, introducing changes to almost all core components of the process and falling short of a number of international standards," said Claude Haagen, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term observer mission. "Such far-reaching reforms, adopted shortly before election day and without addressing almost all previous recommendations, created challenges for transparency, stability, and voters' ability to make fully informed choices. Our strong presence here, with more than 350 parliamentary and ODIHR observers, testifies to our deep support for Kyrgyzstan's democratic path."

Candidates had limited opportunity to reach out to voters due to the short campaign period, as well as the restrictive space for public debate and the overly strict campaign regulations. The campaign was generally low-key and generated limited voter engagement, linked to fears of retribution for political activity. Election legislation provides equal campaign opportunities for all candidates and gives citizens the right to participate in campaigning, but while some competitive activities were observed, the significant financial disparities between candidates meant they could not compete on a level playing field. At the same time, numerous allegations of vote-buying continued throughout the campaign.

"Being a PACE Partner for Democracy is not just a title — it is an ongoing commitment. The PACE delegation is here to support Kyrgyzstan in making every vote count. The assessment we are making here today on these elections will be taken into account by PACE in its future dialogue with the Kyrgyz parliament," said Georgios Stamatis, Head of the PACE delegation. "Special attention will be paid to ensuring the meaningful participation of youth and women in political life as well as people with disabilities. While they enjoy equal electoral rights in Kyrgyzstan, in practice significant barriers persist."

Some 4.3 million voters were registered to vote in yesterday's elections. The election authorities managed technical preparations efficiently, and also prepared election officials for the use of the new electronic devices used at all polling stations for biometric voter identification and voting. While the new equipment was generally assessed positively, trust in the new voting technology was affected by a lack of transparency. The new nationwide option for remote voting provided greater opportunities for voter participation. Observers assessed election day itself as positive overall with procedures

largely followed, but widespread issues with adhering to counting and tabulation procedures after polling stations closed were observed.

The introduction of one reserved seat per district for the underrepresented gender was a welcome measure in increasing the representation of women in politics. This measure is commendable, but nonetheless additional efforts to support their meaningful participation are necessary.

“The introduction of a gender quota in these elections is a welcome and important first step toward improving the position of the underrepresented gender and strengthening women's participation in political life,” said Monika Zajkova, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. “Meaningful representation is achieved through sustained support, an enabling environment, and equal access to public life. We encourage the authorities to build on this initial measure and to advance genuine gender equality, as well as fair representation of all groups, including national minorities and persons with disabilities, throughout the political process.”

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, it also includes unduly broad and vague grounds for restricting this right. Together with an increase in the prosecution of journalists, this has led to widespread self-censorship in the media. Media pluralism has suffered from new legislation that requires media registration, limits foreign ownership, and provides a wide basis for media outlets to be deregistered, as well as the recent nationalization of the public broadcaster. During the election campaign, although state-funded broadcasters provided free airtime in line with the law, their news coverage focused almost entirely on procedural issues, limiting voters’ ability to make an informed choice on election day.

Funding limitations, together with the recent legal amendments that define election observation as a political activity making it mandatory for organizations with foreign funding to register as “foreign representatives”, and fears of retribution for these activities, have greatly weakened the ability of civil society to participate in public life. While the election authorities accredited almost 800 international observers, only two domestic observers from two organizations were accredited.

“The ability to voice a political opinion and the availability of accurate and relevant information are vital for voters to make an informed choice on election day. Unfortunately, despite being efficiently prepared, there were shortcomings with both elements in yesterday’s elections,” said Tamás Meszerics, head of ODIHR’s election observation mission. “To move forward Kyrgyzstan needs to work on creating a more inclusive system both for candidates and voters, which would help increase voter engagement and also public trust.”

The international election observation totalled 359 observers, composed of 269 ODIHR-deployed experts, long-term, and short-term observers, 72 from the OSCE PA, and 18 from PACE.

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